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Letter from the Prelate (October 2010)

The Prelate speaks about devotion to the guardian angels, whose feast is celebrated by the Church on October 2nd. This is also the day on which Opus Dei was founded.

10/04/2010

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

Our soul overflows with joy in imagining our Father's happiness on

October 2, 1928. Let us unite ourselves to the prayer that flowed from his soul when, on his knees, he realized how much trust heaven was placing in him. And let us often consider—every day—the reality that we too were included in that manifestation of God to St. Josemaría.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord, sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever .[1] Tomorrow's Mass for the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels begins with these words from Sacred Scripture, which have to find a strong echo among the women and men of Opus Dei. They can serve as a channel to raise our hearts in gratitude to God on this new anniversary of the foundation, for—as our Father said—“it was not by chance that God inspired the Work on the day when the Church celebrates the angels. . . . We owe them much more than you think.”[2]

It gives me great joy to remind you how often—and specifically in Argentina, in La Chacra—St.

Josemaría suggested to us that, upon entering the oratory, we express our gratitude to the angels for perpetually accompanying our Lord in the Eucharist.

We can consider here the deep roots that devotion to the angels has in the Church. One could say that there is hardly any page in Sacred Scripture—both the Old as well as the New Testament—in which these purely spiritual creatures, who enjoy the beatific vision and are at the service of God’s plans, do not appear.[3] In one of his catechetical addresses, John Paul II said that denying their existence would require radically changing Sacred Scripture itself, and with it the whole history of salvation, [4] thus making a serious mistake.

Tomorrow's feast offers us an opportunity to get to know these heavenly beings better, considering above all that they are God's creatures and that Jesus Christ alone is the center of the angelic world and of the entire cosmos. The primacy of Christ, the Word incarnate, over creation, is one of the foundations of our Catholic faith. *For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him .[5]*

“What is an angel?” Pope Benedict XVI asked. And he answered: “Sacred Scripture and the Church's tradition enable us to discern two aspects. On the one hand, the angel is a creature who stands before God, oriented to God with his whole being. All three names of the archangels end with the word ‘*El*,’ which means ‘God.’ God is inscribed in their names, in their

nature. Their true nature is existing in his sight and for him.”[6]

These statements emphasize that the most important mission of the angels is to adore the Most Holy Trinity, to constantly raise up a song of thanksgiving to the Creator and Lord of all things, visible and invisible. Both angels and men have been created for the same end. The angels have already attained it, while we are still on the way. Therefore, it is a very good idea to count on their help so that they teach us to follow the path that leads to heaven. “I pray to and invoke the angels every day,” our Father once said, “and I go to the intercession of the guardian angels of my children so that we all learn how to accompany our God closely. Thus we will be zealous, souls who are determined to bring the joy of God’s doctrine to all creatures.”[7]

St. Josemaría encouraged us to invoke the angels as we begin our morning prayer every day, after going to the intercession of the Mother of God and St. Joseph. With what devotion do we have recourse to them? With what assurance of being heard? And especially in regard to the celebration of the Eucharist, our Father said: “I adore and praise with the angels—it is not difficult, because I know that, as I celebrate the Holy Mass, they surround me, adoring the Blessed Trinity.”[8] Also when we visit Jesus present in the Tabernacle, and perhaps don’t know how to greet him, or how to express our gratitude or adoration, we can imitate St. Josemaría’s example. “Whenever I enter an oratory,” he confided to us, “I pause to tell our Lord: Jesus, I love you. And I praise the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...And I remember to greet the angels, who are guarding the Tabernacle in a vigil of love, of

adoration, of reparation, rendering homage to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I thank them for being there all day and all night, since I can only be there in my heart: thank you, blessed angels, for always rendering homage and accompanying Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament!”[9] I suggest to you that, day after day, you seek to unite yourselves to our Founder’s prayer, on October 2, 1928: may our hearts not slacken in the dialogue of gratitude and responsibility with which our Father responded.

Since the angels are devout adorers of the Blessed Trinity, they can fulfill with perfection “the second aspect that characterizes angels: they are God’s messengers. They bring God to mankind, they open heaven and thus open earth. Precisely because they are with God, they can also be very close to man.”[10] Jesus revealed this when, speaking of the love of God the Father for children and for those

who become like children, he said:
See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven .

[11]

Based on these words and on other inspired texts, the Church teaches that “from infancy to death human life is surrounded by their watchful care and intercession.”[12] And she makes her own an affirmation frequently found in the writings of the Fathers of the Church: “Each of the faithful has at their side an angel as a protector and shepherd to guide their life.”[13] Among the heavenly spirits, the guardian angels have been placed by God at the side of every man and woman. They are our close friends and allies in the battle we are waging, as Scripture tells us, against the snares of the devil. *For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the*

principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places .[14] Our Father echoes this teaching in clear terms: “Turn to your guardian angel at the moment of trial; he will protect you from the devil and bring you holy inspirations.”[15]

A second-century Christian writer offers some signs for recognizing the suggestions of the good angels and distinguishing them from those of the bad angels. “The angel of righteousness is gentle and modest, meek and peaceful. When, therefore, he comes into your heart, he immediately talks to you of righteousness, purity, chastity, holiness, mortification, and every righteous work and glorious virtue. When all these arise in your heart, know that the angel of righteousness is with you. These are the deeds of

the angel of righteousness. Trust him, then, and his works.”[16]

The struggle between good and evil—the sad inheritance of original sin—is a constant reality in human existence on this earth. Therefore, as an ancient prayer says, we want to ask our guardian angel: *Sancti Angeli Custodes nostri, defendite nos in proelio ut non pereamus in tremendo iudicio* .Holy guardian angels: defend us in battle, so that we do not perish at the final judgment.

From his earliest youth, our Founder cultivated a deep devotion to the angels, and especially to his own guardian angel. Later, from the moment of the foundation of Opus Dei, his biography is filled with a strong and trusting piety towards these worshippers of God, and our good companions on the path to heaven. His writings as well contain abundant references to the ministry

of the angels on behalf of mankind. As Scripture says, *Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?* [17] So great was his faith in the intervention of the angels, that he taught us to consider them as important allies in our apostolic work. “Win over the guardian angel of the one you want to draw to your apostolate. He is always a great ‘accomplice’,” [18] he wrote in *The Way*. And on considering that often the environment in which one finds oneself for professional or social reasons, etc., may seem far from God, he assured us: “You say there are many occasions of going astray in such surroundings? That’s true, but aren’t there any guardian angels as well?” [19]

The pealing of the bells of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, which never died out in our Father’s heart, should resound in our own, as a

reminder that our entire life has to be adoration for God, in union with our Lady, the angels, and the whole Church triumphant.

Our Father also cultivated a friendship with the archangel who—according to some Fathers of the Church—assists each priest in his ministry. “There is a very probable opinion that priests have an angel especially devoted to their care. But many years ago I read that each priest has a ministerial archangel and I was moved. I composed for myself a sort of Alleluia as an aspiration, and I recite it to my ministerial archangel in the morning and at night. At times I have thought that I do not have sufficient motive to believe in this, just because it was written by a Father of the Church whose name I don't even remember. But then I think of the goodness of my Father God, and I grow certain that, by praying to my ministerial

archangel, even if I didn't have one, our Lord would send me one, to give a basis for my prayer and my devotion.”[20]

Let us often stop to think about these and other teachings regarding the holy angels and strive to put them into practice, each in one's own way. Let us go to their help with confidence and trust. Internal difficulties that seem insuperable, exterior obstacles that look like real walls, are overcome with the help of these friends who are so powerful and to whose care God has entrusted us. But, as our Founder taught, drinking from the fountain of the Church's spiritual tradition, we need to foster an authentic friendship with our guardian angel and with those of the people we are trying to reach in our apostolate. For “the guardian angel is a Prince of Heaven whom God has placed at our side to watch over and assist us, to encourage us in

our trials, to lighten our suffering, to guide and uphold us if we are about to fall.”[21]

We find another reflection that can give us a lot of consolation in St. Josemaría’s book *Furrow* : “The guardian angel always accompanies us as our principal witness. It is he who, at your particular judgment, will remember the kind deeds you performed for our Lord throughout your life. Furthermore, when you feel lost, before the terrible accusations of the enemy, your angel will present those intimations of your heart—which perhaps you yourself might have forgotten—those proofs of love which you might have had for God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. That is why you must never forget your guardian angel, and that Prince of Heaven will not abandon you now, or at that decisive moment.”[22]

In our spiritual struggle and in the apostolate, we can always count on the care and the protection of the Queen of Angels. During this month we celebrate one of her feasts under the advocacy of the Rosary. This Marian devotion is “a powerful weapon”[23] in all our battles for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. I hope that we will all put special affection into praying this prayer with piety in the coming weeks, with the conviction that our heavenly Mother, throughout this Marian Year, will obtain for us abundant graces from her Son.

In finishing, I remind you that the upcoming 6th is the anniversary of the canonization of our Father. Let us ask our Lord, through his intercession, that the supernatural joy that filled our heart on that day, and the spur towards holiness that we then received, will be kept alive and vigorous in his daughters and

sons in Opus Dei, and in all those who come close to the Work. I confess to you that each day I ask St. Josemaría to make very much present in each one of us those clear words— *the saint of ordinary life* — which the Servant of God John Paul II applied to him.[24] We could consider it also in this light: St. Josemaría is the saint who helps us in all the circumstances of each day. Let us take greater advantage of that “occupation” of our Father, who loves us very, very much, but who wants us to be saints.

Truly, every month there are many feasts of the Church and commemorations of the Work’s history: consider them carefully, so that our daily *serviam!* be very generous.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, October 1, 2010

Footnotes:

1. *Dan* 3:23:37.

2. St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family gathering, December 24, 1963.

3. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 331-333.

4. Cf. John Paul II, Address at a general audience, July 9, 1986.

5. *Col* 1:16.

6. Benedict XVI, Homily, September 29, 2007.

7. St. Josemaría, Notes taken at a family gathering, October of 1972.

8. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 89.

9. St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, January 6, 1972.
10. Benedict XVI, Homily, September 29, 2007.
11. *Mt* 18:10.
12. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 336.
13. St. Basil, *Contra Eunomius* 3:1 (PG 29, 656B).
14. *Eph* 6:12.
15. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 567.
16. Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Sixth Commandment, no. 2.
17. *Heb* 1:14.
18. St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 563.
19. *Ibid.*, no. 566.
20. St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, November 26, 1967.

21. St. Josemaria, Notes from a family gathering, June 16, 1974.

22. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 693.

23. St. Josemaría, Holy Rosary, Prologue.

24. Cf. John Paul II, *Litteras Decretales* for the canonization of our Father, October 6, 2002.

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